

An Essay  
on  
The Physician & his duties,  
Respectfully submitted to the  
Faculty  
of the  
Homoeopathic Medical College  
of  
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## The Physician his duties.

The word Physician is defined in "Dunglison's Dictionary" as follows, "One who has received his Degree from an incorporated Institution as Doctor of Medicine." It is the intention of the writer, to indicate as far as the limits of this paper will permit, what in his judgement, the Physician ought to be in addition to what the above definition expresses.

In order to do this, it will be proper to state what the motives for becoming a Physician should be; the qualifications requisite; the



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relations he sustains to the public & to his patients  
& lastly, what his character should be.

There  
is not a more important era in the existence of  
a man, than the time when it becomes necessary  
for him to select for himself the profession, with  
which for the remainder of his life he expects to  
be identified:— it will be well if he gives the sub-  
ject, careful consideration; that man who contem-  
plates entering the medical profession needs  
particularly to weigh the matter & its consequen-  
ces, before he takes his first lessons in the science  
— he should not enter it by the advice of friends,  
if that advice conflicts with his own desires, or  
because advantages of a superior character are  
at his command; & in fact not at all, unless he  
is really interested in the noble work; he must  
feel a desire to do something better, than

merely to reap the pecuniary benefits which may accrue to him:— the desire to relieve human suffering should occupy a prominent place in the list of reasons. The many sacrifices of comfort & social enjoyment to which he is likely to be subjected are to be duly thought about, & he must determine that he still feels sufficient love for the profession to pursue it in earnest, with the express intention of devoting his whole time & best energies to the acquisition of that knowledge, which cannot be dispensed with by those who expect or hope to be successful.

The fact that the degree of M.D. has been conferred on a person who has been pursuing the study of medicine, may be taken as good evidence that he has acquired some knowledge of the principles of the science; but the studies



are not to be laid aside at this point, as if there were no farther need of them; the truth is that he now has opened to him a wider field, in which to gather from experience (that "best of teachers" when the learner begins with correct ideas) new stores of information: he should remember that the study is endless; every individual case to which he is called, will present symptoms peculiar to itself, although the general outlines of the disease under which his patient labors, will resemble many others; still as constitutions, temperaments, habits of living & other surrounding circumstances vary, so must every case of disease be modified; the arranging of classes of disease & directing any special treatment for all that are embraced in a particular class being entirely arbitrary: it is the duty of the practitioner to give each case his careful attention, in order to distinguish these peculiarities

and conduct the treatment accordingly; while doing this, though it must claim a large share of his time & thoughts, he must not forget the alphabet of the science:—I would have his library small & well selected, rather than large & ill conditioned;—filled, however small it be, with books that may be of practical use, instead of such as merely make a show;—a few standard works on all the different branches, (such as were used during the preparatory course just finished), should be kept on his table for reference & study during his leisure hours, & these will not be wanting;—if this be not done the intimate knowledge he may have gained in his pupils, will be lost in some of its complex portions at least, when however the more important parts are once fixed in the memory, very little study is necessary to bring the whole before him as



clearly as ever. — It is not or at least it ought not to be supposed that any can become well enough informed on these subjects, to drop the study of them at once & forever on taking his degree, & though the people about him may consider him fully competent to discharge all the duties of his calling, the idea that he is still a student should be carried in his mind through life.

It becomes necessary for the physician to visit not only the wealthy & those comfortably situated, but the distressed & miserably poor; he should attend the calls of the latter as readily as those of the former; — all he needs to know, is the fact that a fellow being is suffering & requires his aid.

Again the family of the laborer or poor man, should receive as faithful care, as that of the "millionaire"; the inhabitants of the hovel

are not less human than those of the palace,  
 & equally claim attention. — I remember being,  
 not long since, in conversation with a practi-  
 tioner, (I am sorry to be obliged to say that he is a Hom-  
 oepathist) now doing business in Philadelphia,  
 who remarked to me that he had "refused to at-  
 tend a great many poor people, because the  
 wealthier — would not employ him if they knew  
 he answered such calls: — I think it a disgrace  
 to Homoeopathy, that it has among its advocates  
 those who entertain no higher views of the ob-  
 jects of the "healing art" — it is no sin for a man  
 to be poor, provided he is honest & industrious;  
 & in that poverty he all the more needs our  
 aid & sympathy: — if the presence of the poor,  
 prevent the coming of the rich to the office,  
 they may be visited at home, rather than refuse  
 attendance; it being infinitely better to



accumulate less wealth, than to allow the desire for the patronage of the rich, to obliterate every tender feeling from the breast;— before the calls of the suffering all distinctions of wealth & station vanish, & he who is unwilling to do a fellow mortal service for humanity's sake is unworthy the name of a man;— nor is this all, professional advice may not be the only thing needed—the poor may be suffering from absolute want of the common comforts of life, or it may be, the means at their disposal are through ignorance misused;— such an outlay of money as his purse will permit in the first instance, & kind, judicious advice in the second, are demanded of the physician.

The physician, as much for his own success & advancement as the comfort of his patients, should be a gentleman in the fullest sense of the

word: - it should be his earnest endeavor to preserve an unruffled temper in all cases & under every variety of circumstances: - the power to do so can be acquired only by constant watchfulness & a rigid course of training, but it is with this as with the opposite, the more practice there is given to it the nearer the approximation to perfection; that is, the more one allows himself to be coarse & unmannerly the more brutish he becomes, & the more he cultivates elegance of manners the more accomplished he will become: - I know that there are many things to annoy: - the directions left for the management of the sick, - & respecting the diet, medicine &c may not have been properly attended, or the friends may have a multiplicity of questions to ask, or may endeavor to force their own opinions with regard to the treatment or regimen of the patient, into



the physician's notice:—these things are well calculated to irritate & betray one into the use of language & tones such as would ever after be regretted, unless the discipline that has been mentioned is faithfully tried.

It is of infinite importance, I should rath-  
er say it is indispensable, that the attendants  
on the sick be cheerful, while in the room at  
least; this remark applies especially to the phy-  
sician;—during his visits he should banish as  
much as possible from his thoughts, every-  
thing that might tend to leave traces of trouble  
& care depicted in his countenance; his fea-  
tures will be carefully studied & everything which  
may have the appearance of anxiety, will at  
once be taken by each patient, as indicative of  
the danger attending his particular case, & as  
it not unfrequently happens, the excitement

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which such a conclusion has caused, will prevent to a considerable extent the proper operation of the remedial agents employed; - on the other hand cheerfulness may either direct the thoughts of the patient away from himself, or inspire him with so much confidence, that the state of the mind will be such as to cease to exert any depressing influence, after the first visit.

Presence of mind as it is termed is also a valuable characteristic in the physician, & it should be cultivated, as he will be called many times to visit patients, when all the people to whom he would most naturally look for aid, will be in such a state of excitement that they can render no services of value; the recovery or death of the patient may be almost wholly dependent on the firm



ness he possesses; as the least wavering on his part will only add to the confusion, while an exhibition of self-control, will inspire all with confidence.

A few words with regard to the treatment of disease & we will pass to another part of our subject; in the choice of a mode of treatment the physician should use his own judgement; unbiased by the prejudices of people outside of the profession; if he has a fair share of knowledge & takes "*Similia Similibus Curantur*" for his guide, the only sensible law of cure the world has ever yet known called by another "*One of God's eternal truths*" a title which it merits beyond a shadow of doubt, as many more would acknowledge if they dared to think for themselves, instead of clinging so tenaciously to the accumulated errors of past ages, he will rarely fail to be successful.

There are some men in the profession calling themselves Homoeopaths, with whom I am entirely out of patience; a portion of them are in the habit of consulting the preferences of the patient, in a choice, between the "Homoeopathic" treatment & the Allopathic, employing the one or the other, not from the belief that it suits the case best, but because it suits the peculiar notions of the person under treatment: others cannot rest contented unless they mix drugs (the case of an individual residing in the State of New York is too well known by most Homoeopaths to make it necessary to adduce proof of the the last statement) I believe that the physician has no right to trifle thus with the sick, & I doubt also his right to deceive the public; - his duty then is clearly manifest; if he adopts a certain name & subscribes to a certain law of cure he must do so in good faith, & adhere to it in practice.



One duty which is quite as important as any already considered, must not be passed by without a brief notice at least. - Whatever the physician learns either by accident or in his examinations, with regard to the private affairs of his patients, should be kept a profound secret; - even when on oath, in a court of justice, he should not allow the fear of imprisonment for contempt, nor the most strenuous endeavors of the pettifogger, to draw from his lips any thing that in his judgement, the world at large has no right to know. I think the promise to "tell the truth &c" does not embrace matters of this character, or if it does, then I doubt the right of courts to administer, & of witnesses to take an oath; there is less to be feared from his manner of expressing secrets, than from the habit of gossiping to which some are addicted; of course the physician must guard against such a habit with the utmost care.

It is undoubtedly the duty of every man

in whatever station of life, he may be situated, to cultivate the principles of morality; there are few who are so liable to temptation as the physician; his relations to the opposite sex are different from those of any other man; as the amount of confidence reposed in him is greater so are the opportunities for abusing confidence increased - this may furnish many temptations; if ever a man needs the support of well established principles of integrity it is now; if he is still wavering between a life of rectitude, & the indulgence of his senses, he will in such trials be likely to fail to do right; if on the contrary he has made the acquisition of a character of sterling worth among his first cares, & highest aims, he can face the danger fearlessly & will pass the strongest temptation by unnoticed.

I purpose to consider, in a special manner, but one or two of the snare, from among the



many) that beset the path of the physician just  
 beginning practice. - It not unfrequently happens  
 that an individual in the form & wearing the  
 guise of a man, but for whose meaner language  
 has no expression) betrays a female who has trusted  
 him & given him her best affections, while he all the  
 the time though professing to return a full meas-  
 ure of regard, is making those professions a mask  
 under which to effect the purpose originally de-  
 signed by him (the gratification of his passions) care-  
 less of the fact, that it also involves the ruin of her  
 whom he is deceiving. - the poor unfortunate,  
 knowing full well the tender mercies of the world with  
 its finger of scorn ever after pointed at her, the cold  
 look & the curled lip greeting her in her daily walk & her  
 name branded with infamy, hopes that she may  
 still conceal her condition, comes to tell her story  
 & solicit aid, appealing to the sympathies & urging

her claims for assistance with all her power -  
 or it may be that her seducer at the time that he  
 is ruining one, is endeavoring to win a companion  
 from among the more wealthy - the exposure of  
 the circumstances of this case, would put an end  
 at once to all hope of success - some active  
 measures must be taken to rid him of the encum-  
 brance - he does not dare to trust those who  
 make a business of attending to such matters, some  
 bad management being feared, nor to an  
 older physician because he has a reputation  
 which he cannot afford to lose & money would  
 be no temptation to him - while pondering on  
 the subject he calls to mind a young man, who  
 for the five or six years since his graduation,  
 has been barely able to live on his earnings,  
 even by the most rigid economy: 'Oh!' he thinks 'here is  
 a fellow who has no reputation to lose, he has thus far



lived in obscurity - beside this he is sadly in want of money; I can apply to him without fear & no doubt shall find him ready to engage in this business." Our young practitioner is visited, at a time (it happens) when the calls for his services are fewer than usual: - either of these cases present temptation strong enough to over-whelm many a man; our friend is in a dangerous position, a moment's hesitation may cost him, what should be as dear as life itself, his honor - these solicitations should invariably be met with a prompt refusal, from which decision no entreaty or argument should be allowed to move him. Applications of a similar character, may be effected from another source, by practitioners of every age & standing; these will come from married women, whose husbands will join in the request - I can well imagine why a woman who cannot be contented unless she is in the midst of some ex-

citement; for whom the ballroom or theater have more attractions than the home fireside, should desire to be free from such restraints as would prevent the full indulgence in her (misnamed) pleasures - but why women who appear to be sensible on every other subject, should be so far misled as to desire such assistance from her physician is almost unaccountable: these cases must be treated like the others; with an unqualified refusal; it is clearly the duty of the physician not only to refuse to assist but to endeavor to prevent by persuasion the commission of the crime: for crime it is, & not simply because it is condemned by the laws of the land, but because it is a violation of the commonest principles of right. - In a profession holding the important rank that the one under consideration does, it might be supposed that none but highminded honorable men



would be found - unfortunately this is not true - there are those among us wearing the name & claiming the respect due to the physician who do not scruple to perform what honest men would scorn the thought of doing their whole life-business seeming to be the accumulation of "Gold;" it being an object of worship to them rather than any thing else; - a miserly spirit is not right - we will therefore count it neither among the "duties" nor "qualifications" of the physician but among those evils to be sedulously avoided.

The consideration of the habitual use of alcoholic liquors & tobacco, seems to belong to this part of our subjects - I believe that the use of both or either of these articles cannot be too strongly censured; the former totally unfits a man for the common business of life & the latter (whether the single habit is the use of alcohol

this is not all (though the doctrine I advocate is not  
 taught in any of the schools):— there is nothing on  
 the broad earth, that is not calculated to remind us  
 of an Almighty Creator, if we will but reflect yet  
 I think there is nothing more subservient to  
 this purpose than the Medical Science —  
 — whether the student examines the complex  
 anatomical structure of the human body for the  
 purpose of ascertaining its chemical composition,  
 or the arrangement of its minute particles, or for  
 the purpose of inquiring into the many & varied  
 functions of the different organs; the manner in  
 which motion is performed & the means used to pro-  
 duce it; or studies the digestion of food, its ab-  
 sorption - its conversion into blood, its entrance  
 into the circulation; the transmission of it to a  
 spot where it is needed to repair some wasting  
 tissue & its immediate application to that use



or tobacco) does nearly as much — in the medical profession the most brilliant intellect, is hardly able to cope with its duties when not at all interfered with by external impressions; — all the powers of reflection are required in very many instances; — these powers cannot possibly be used advantageously when stupefied, as they must be, by the over-stimulation consequent upon the constant use of these pernicious articles; — there is another argument against them that ought, in itself, to be sufficient to abolish the use of them among sensible men; — it is, that drinking alcohol is a disgusting habit & using tobacco is positively vile & filthy — the physician then, must abstain entirely from the use of stimulants & narcotics, if he would not disgrace himself & his calling. —

Thus far, I have only contended that the physician should be a moral man; but I believe

- the heart & circulatory system & its function - the brain & nervous system with the offices performed by them including the senses of taste, sight & hearing, & the contrivances necessary to make these senses useful - the respiratory system with the vocal organs; - the organs of generation & the wonderful function they perform; - the process which is set up to repair a part that has been injured by violence - the progress of disease & recovery; the necessity of certain conditions in the economy of nature that the integrity of the body may be preserved; or notices the living body in full vigor endowed <sup>with</sup> reason & powers of thought able to unlock nature's vaults & storehouses of wisdom, he cannot fail if he reflects, to trace forethought, design, wisdom, in this adapting of means to ends - he cannot help seeing "God" written in unmistakable characters in every



step of his investigations — A physician ought  
 to be, then, not a moral man simply but a  
 religious one — he has no excuse if he is not —  
 if he is true to the promptings of his nature & the  
 convictions that must be forced upon his mind — if  
 he does not crush out the spark that is implanted  
 in his breast (in common with all human beings) he  
 will become so — of course it is a duty he owes  
 to himself, but he also owes it to his patients, as  
 he will many times have occasion to tender his  
 Christian sympathies to the friends of those who are  
 passing from earthly scenes; a few kind words of  
 christian consolation may do incalculable good  
 to the departing who already has the fullest confi-  
 dence in the fatherly care of his Maker — but in-  
 finitely more useful will it be when he is called to  
 the bedside, of those of his fellow beings who have neg-  
 lected to look after the things that belong to the spir-

it<sup>23</sup> until disease has begun its ravages & the hour  
 of dissolution is rapidly drawing near—still in doubt  
 as to the result of his past neglects, having repented it at  
 this late hour he appeals to his medical adviser (whom he  
 looks up to perhaps as his best earthly friend) for the con-  
 firmation of his hopes & the dispersion of his fears  
 if his attendant is a man indifferent to such  
 matters what he can say will be of no value—if how-  
 ever he have a ~~soul~~ filled with the spirit of God, he  
 can do much to smooth the pillow of the dying & render  
 (what would otherwise be) an unhappy departure com-  
 paratively easy—I may be thought an enthusiast  
 but I truly believe that the physician can exert  
 a power second to none on earth, not even to his  
 whose whole life is devoted to the teaching of religion,  
 having in the nature of things a strong hold on the  
 confidence of his patient such as the minister can  
 not possibly acquire & gaining it by a means that the



minister cannot bring to bear - So it is objected that ~~xx~~  
 the physician is called to visit men of every creed & denom-  
 ination which will render it difficult to make religion  
 the subject of conversation - I reply that on the es-  
 sential points all true Christians must agree & the  
 necessity of urging any particular creed is thus obviated,  
 but if the objection held good it does not alter the  
 physician's duty at all - he is bound in any event  
 to be a Christian.

I have now arrived at the point that was des-  
 ignated in the beginning as "the limits of this paper" - it  
 has been written & presented with the full conscious-  
 ness of the fact that a great subject has been barely  
 touched upon & also that short as this essay is it is  
 long enough to have a great many faults - what has  
 been written however is a faithful transcript of the  
 views of the writer, roughly delineated it is true,  
 without any pretension to artistic skill. - Not a

little comfort is derived from the thought that in  
the close confinement that may await these pages  
the views expressed cannot possibly do harm in the  
world & as (according to Dr Duglison) a thesis is  
"never regarded by the preceptor or others" after its  
first examination is over, it is hoped that this,  
honored by a reception, will rest in peace in the  
Archives of the author's Alma Mater.